



TOWARDS A CITIZENS' BETTER TOMORROW

Fighting Censorship, Fake News and Viewpoint Discrimination

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"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

-- Universal Declaration of Human Rights

I . Introduction

In an era marked by the ubiquitous availability of information, the unbridled freedom to speak and express oneself assumes an unparalleled significance. As the linchpin of democracy, the bedrock of progress, and the cornerstone of individual liberty, it is an essential value that must be fiercely safeguarded. Nevertheless, the right to free speech is presently confronting formidable challenges, and its advocates must join forces to bolster its defense.

The current predicament is an intricate one, as the government is legally obligated to safeguard the fundamental rights and liberties of its populace, yet paradoxically, it has increasingly eroded the principles of free speech and veracity.

Concomitantly, the market mechanisms that have long functioned as a defensive

barrier against governmental intervention are currently facing a unique series of impediments. This predicament is exemplified by the emergence of counterfeit news, the diffusion of discriminatory rhetoric, and the escalation of societal factionalism. The same technologies that have democratized and amplified communication avenues have also fostered their manipulation, subversion, and distortion. As a result, a three-pronged crisis of credibility, authenticity, and democracy is extant.

In light of the present context, it is imperative to reassess the role of governmental and market forces in fostering free and responsible speech. We must acknowledge that the primary obligation of the government is to safeguard the fundamental rights and liberties of citizens, which includes the freedom of speech. However, state authority should not be employed as a panacea for combating fake news and viewpoint discrimination, as it would entail an encroachment on the freedom of speech. Governmental intervention can precipitate political manipulation or the stifling of divergent perspectives.

In contrast, the free market plays an invaluable role in facilitating free and responsible speech. The competitive and innovative ethos of the free market engenders a profusion of media options, thereby enabling the public to make informed and judicious choices. Additionally, the free market furnishes a potent mechanism for countering disinformation and unjustifiable viewpoints. Accordingly, the government ought to refrain from intervention and allow the market to self-regulate.

Within the free market milieu, both journalists and the public assume critical

functions. Journalists are duty-bound to adhere to professional ethics and protocols to furnish as much veracious and precise information as feasible. On the other hand, the public must assume a more proactive stance by exercising rational thinking and employing discretion to filter out high-caliber sources of information, and actively participating in public discourses to challenge and invalidate untenable viewpoints.

II. The government's role in promoting free speech and potential negative consequences of censorship

In a democratic society, the primary responsibility of the government is to safeguard the rights and liberties of its populace; of these, the right to free speech is paramount and cherished. Serving as a pillar of democracy, it empowers citizens to articulate their thoughts, viewpoints, and convictions without apprehension of persecution.

Nevertheless, despite the critical role of free speech in promoting an open and just society, governments around the world have increasingly sought to curtail it in the name of combating fake news and viewpoint discrimination. Even in the United States, which is often considered to have very free speech, recent research results show that there is a serious crisis in freedom of speech, especially under the influence of the censorship

system (The New York Times Editorial Board, 2022). Currently, the state of freedom of speech worldwide is not optimistic.

Notwithstanding the virtuousness of the underlying motive, interventions of such nature cannot escape the potential negative ramifications they carry. Indeed, they hold the capacity to impede dissenting viewpoints and curb the spirit of innovation and advancement. By constraining the multiplicity of perspectives, governmental censorship may, in fact, attenuate the quality of public discourse and undermine the very democratic principles it endeavors to uphold. The rationale behind such an eventuality is the nebulous nature of the term "fake news," which remains open to various interpretations.

Thus, governmental attempts to regulate the same may metamorphose into a tool for suppressing legitimate sources of news and viewpoints critical of the incumbents. Consequently, governmental interventions in the media can precipitate the politicization of news coverage, wherein media outlets become mouthpieces for the ruling party rather than impartial purveyors of information. In extreme cases, censorship may lead to authoritarianism and dictatorship by abolishing the checks and balances indispensable for maintaining governmental authority within reasonable limits.¹

¹ A typical example is China. On August 11, 1958, the *People's Daily* reported the "glorious achievements" of Xushui County, Hebei Province, which harvested 1.2 billion catties (600 million kg) of grain in a year. Mao Zedong inspected the area on August 4, 1958, and gave high praise. Two days later, on August 13, 1958, the *People's Daily* reported on the front page that Jianguo Commune in Macheng County, Hubei Province, had set a record of 36,956 pounds (18,478 kg) of early rice per mu. During the "Great Leap Forward," such false reports of production were widespread. Then, on September 18, 1958, the *People's Daily* reported on the "remarkable achievement" of irrigating yams with dog meat soup to achieve a yield of 1.2 million catties (600,000 kg) per mu. At the same time, countless

The possible detriments associated with censorship extend beyond the sphere of politics, as they can encroach upon the creative arts, scientific inquiry, and intellectual inquisitiveness. In curbing the ambit of acceptable ideas, censorship deprives society of the multiplicity of viewpoints that are instrumental in promoting advancement and development. Furthermore, government censorship holds the potential to induce a chilling effect on public discourse, wherein individuals may exercise self-censorship to avoid reprisals (Gibson & Sutherland, 2020).

Given the plausibility of unfavorable consequences, it is unequivocally imperative that the government adheres unwaveringly to its pledge to uphold the right to free speech, eschewing any temptation to engage in censorious activities, irrespective of their purportedly altruistic motivations. In lieu thereof, the government should prioritize the cultivation of media literacy and the fostering of critical thinking skills among citizens, facilitating their ability to effectively distinguish between reliable and dubious information sources. Furthermore, the government must proactively promote the dissemination of a multifarious range of perspectives, and zealously safeguard the media's autonomy from any incursion of governmental influence.

Chinese farmers were starving to death. According to secret official statistics, only in Xinyang region of Henan Province, the number of deaths reached 1,073,210, accounting for 13.2% of the total population of that area (Lin, 2008). As for the countless people who starved to death and incalculable economic losses caused by the "Great Leap Forward," "Launching Satellites," and "Anti-Concealment of Production" campaigns throughout the country, the Chinese media remained silent under government control, while continuing to report on various absurd "great achievements" to complement the leaders' refusal to admit their mistakes and launch various social movements such as the "Anti-Rightist Opportunism." This further pushed China towards the abyss of authoritarianism and dictatorship (Ding, n.d.).

III. The benefits of the free market in promoting competition and innovation

The free market, through its capacity to serve as a formidable impetus for innovation and competition, has demonstrated its prowess in the media sector; providing ample space for a diverse array of voices and perspectives to be expressed, while fostering risk-taking and flexibility. The free market has engendered a vibrant and constantly fluctuating media ecosystem, conferring benefits upon both media consumers and producers alike. This ecosystem, marked by its dynamism and adaptability, stimulates producers to strive for excellence in content creation and delivery. Additionally, it affords consumers an ever-evolving landscape of media offerings, granting them the freedom to choose from a wide range of options.

A. Greater media choices and improved public information selection and judgment

The free market structure has consistently garnered praise for its capacity to stimulate innovation and rivalry, and the media realm is no exception to this trend. Through its support for a multitude of media outlets contending for audience engagement, the free market drives the creation of fresh and diverse media forms, thereby affording the populace an expanded array of information sources to choose from.

In addition to increased media diversity, the free market can also lead to improved public information selection and judgment. In a competitive media landscape, outlets

that consistently report false or biased information are likely to lose credibility and therefore, audience trust (Newman & Fletcher, 2017). As a result, media outlets are incentivized to produce high-quality, accurate reporting that meets the needs of their audience.

Moreover, competition can also drive media outlets to invest in better reporting techniques, technologies and practices. For instance, investigative journalism, which is often expensive and time-consuming, usually not be prioritized by government-controlled media outlets². However, in a competitive environment, outlets may be more likely to invest in investigative journalism to distinguish themselves from their competitors.

In the end, the free market's impact on the media can culminate in a more knowledgeable and sophisticated citizenry, which highly because an abundance of choices in sources of information can afford individuals exposure to varying perspectives and opinions.

B. Strong counter-mechanism against fake news and unjustified views

The free market has a strong counter-mechanism against fake news and unjustified views. When the media operates in a competitive environment, there is a greater incentive for accuracy and objectivity. Consumers have more choices and are more likely to seek out reliable sources of information, forcing media outlets to improve the

² Indeed, government-controlled media often do some very time-consuming and costly things, but those things are usually harmful rubbish.

quality of their reporting.

Furthermore, the competitive nature of the free market incentivizes various subjects outlets to invest in research and development of advanced technologies to combat the proliferation of fake news. Websites and tools designed to assist with fact-checking have emerged, aiming to help the public verify the accuracy of media information (Marr, 2021). These innovative tools have evolved to become increasingly sophisticated, employing cutting-edge techniques such as artificial intelligence and machine learning to scrutinize news articles and flag disinformation³.

Another way the free market promotes a strong counter-mechanism against fake news is through the emergence of alternative media outlets (Liedke & Gottfried, 2022). In a competitive market, there is room for a variety of perspectives and viewpoints, which can help to expose biased reporting and challenge established narratives.

In addition, digital media has enabled more interactive and participatory forms of journalism (Kramp & Loosen, 2018), with readers and viewers able to provide feedback and engage directly with journalists and media outlets. This has led to a greater sense of accountability and transparency in the media, as journalists are more responsive to their audiences and are able to correct errors and clarify misconceptions in real time.

³ You can visit <https://www.rand.org/research/projects/truth-decay/fighting-disinformation/search.html>, where there are many tools for this.

IV. Alternative solutions to government intervention

A. Industry self-regulation and codes of conduct

In the absence of governmental intervention and regulation, the media industry enjoys the liberty to engage in self-regulation and generate groundbreaking strategies that cater to the ever-evolving demands of consumers.

Self-regulation within the media sector engenders remarkable advantages, particularly through its enhancement of flexibility and adaptability to cope with the constantly changing landscape. In contrast to legal frameworks that are often sluggish in keeping abreast of developments, self-regulatory bodies are better equipped to promptly address emerging issues and trends within the industry (The Possibilities and Limits of Self-regulation, n.d.). Furthermore, self-regulation effectively harnesses the industry's exceptional expertise and knowledge to establish and enforce standards, a valuable advantage over relying solely on government officials who may lack the required knowledge and proficiency (Valentine, 1998).

In addition to promoting adaptability and flexibility, industry self-regulation can strengthen trust and boost the media's credibility by demonstrating a steadfast dedication to upholding ethical and professional standards (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2008). Such a display of commitment can prove crucial in combatting negative perceptions of the media as biased or untrustworthy, and in reinforcing public trust in the media's fundamental role as an impartial and reliable

dispenser of factual and objective information.

Codes of conduct, which represent another facet of industry self-regulation, can furnish a set of guidelines and standards for media organizations to follow. These codes can cover a broad array of issues, ranging from accuracy and fairness in reporting to safeguarding the privacy and dignity of individuals. By adhering to these codes, media organizations can demonstrate their adherence to ethical and professional standards, while also providing a clear set of expectations for journalists and media professionals to adhere to (SPJ Code of Ethics, 2014).

B. Public education campaigns and media literacy programs

In addition to industry self-regulation, media literacy programs and public education campaigns represent an alternative solution to government intervention in promoting free speech and combating fake news. Such initiatives aim to educate individuals on how to critically analyze and evaluate media content, and to develop the skills necessary to distinguish between accurate and inaccurate information.

Diverse in form and approach, media literacy programs encompass a range of initiatives, including face-to-face seminars and digital curricula. Their educational content is multifaceted, addressing the media's role in society, the distinction between factual information and subjective viewpoints, and methods for assessing source credibility and ideological bias. By furnishing people with the means to navigate the media terrain, media literacy programs afford them agency to make informed decisions

and foster media accountability.

In addition to media literacy programs, public education campaigns represent a viable solution to promoting responsible communication and combatting the spread of misinformation. By leveraging social media and other communication platforms, such campaigns can raise public awareness about the importance of accurate reporting and provide guidance on how to identify and report fake news. In turn, this can foster a culture of responsible communication and strengthen public trust in the media's role as a reliable source of information.

One conceivable impediment of public education campaigns and media literacy programs lies in guaranteeing their reach to a vast and diverse audience. It is crucial to ensure that such initiatives are accessible to individuals from all walks of life, including those with limited access to education or technology. Furthermore, it is important to avoid politicizing or exhibiting bias in media literacy programs, as this may subvert their efficacy and erode public trust in these initiatives.

V. Journalists Need to Take Action

Objective and fair reporting is essential for the media to maintain public trust and facilitate rational decision-making. In this regard, journalists are obligated to pursue

unbiased reportage and present information in a manner that enables the public to independently form their opinions. While objective and fair reporting is the ideal, it is not always easy to achieve. There are a number of challenges and limitations that can make it difficult for journalists to maintain their ethical responsibilities.

One major challenge is bias. Journalists are only human, and they bring their own experiences and perspectives to their reporting. This can lead to unintentional bias, where a journalist's personal beliefs or experiences influence the way they report on a story. In order to overcome this, journalists must be aware of their own biases and strive to be objective in their reporting.

Another challenge is commercial pressures. In many cases, media organizations are driven by profit and may be more concerned with generating clicks or views than with providing accurate and unbiased reporting. This can lead to sensationalism, where stories are exaggerated in order to attract attention, or to a focus on entertainment rather than information (Vanacore, 2021). This requires them to present a comprehensive picture of all perspectives on an issue, without resorting to the manipulation of information for the sake of creating a more captivating narrative.

Another important aspect of fair reporting is the use of reliable sources. Journalists should make every effort to verify information before reporting it and should always attribute their sources. This not only helps to ensure the accuracy of the reporting, but also allows readers to evaluate the reliability of the information for themselves.

Lastly, journalists face limitations in their reporting. Government censorship or the lack of sources can restrict the scope of their reporting. Journalists reporting on politically charged issues may face legal barriers or threats of violence. And those reporting on scientific research may lack access to experts or data. To surmount these obstacles, journalists must be resourceful and creative in their reporting efforts, and strive to deliver the most precise and comprehensive coverage possible.

VI. The Public Needs to Take Action

Free speech is not only a right but a duty and responsibility. It is the engine of progress, the foundation of democracy, and the soul of humanity. We must defend it with passion, reason, and courage, for ourselves and for future generations.

A. Ability to discern fake from real information

In the contemporary era marked by an excess of information, the capability to differentiate between genuine and counterfeit information assumes paramount significance. To this end, it is imperative that the general public is equipped with the requisite competencies to scrutinize and appraise the credibility of information sources. Achieving this objective necessitates fostering a combination of media literacy and critical thinking proficiencies that can be inculcated through educational interventions

and public awareness initiatives.

Central to the issue is the imperative for the populace to acknowledge the susceptibility to being influenced and prejudiced by the information they are presented. Given the proliferation of attention-grabbing headlines, fabricated narratives, and deceitful content propagated via social media, individuals must develop a propensity to scrutinize the credibility and intentions of information sources.

To attain this goal, one potential avenue is the cultivation of fact-checking competencies. The capacity to ascertain the veracity of information is imperative to fostering enlightened decision-making and thwarting the propagation of misinformation. The populace can additionally act as a bulwark against the proliferation of spurious news stories by exposing them and submitting reports on them. Besides fact-checking, critical thinking skills are indispensable in scrutinizing the dependability and credibility of information. The ability to scrutinize and construe data, recognize logical fallacies, and grasp statistical reasoning can equip individuals with the means to comprehend intricate issues and elude the clutches of misguidance.

B. Active participation in public discussion and dissemination of accurate information

The propagation of reliable and veracious information is a prerequisite for upholding a healthy and informed society. Contemporary technological advancements in social media and other online platforms have facilitated the dissemination of

information, however, they have also accelerated the dissemination of erroneous and deceptive information, which can easily and swiftly circulate throughout the digital realm (Vosoughi et al., 2018).

Proactively engaging in public discourse and disseminating precise information is a crucial means by which the public can bolster responsible communication. By actively participating in conversations and spreading precise information, individuals can combat the proliferation of fabricated news and misleading information. Such a task necessitates a requisite level of media literacy and critical thinking acumen. People must possess the ability to differentiate credible information sources and assess the dependability of the information they come across. Additionally, they must remain cognizant of their own biases and be receptive to hearing different viewpoints.

The public also needs to hold the media accountable. This includes reporting inaccuracies and promoting responsible journalism. Social media has also made it easier for individuals to provide feedback to media outlets and hold them accountable for their reporting.

Active participation in public discussion and dissemination of accurate information requires effort and a willingness to engage in difficult conversations. However, it is an essential part of promoting responsible communication and ensuring that society is informed by accurate and reliable information.

VII. Conclusion

As we conclude this discussion on the role of government, free market, media ethics, and public responsibility in enabling free and responsible speech, we are left with a fundamental question: how can we ensure that our society is well-informed, rational and open-minded?

The answer is not simple, as there are no easy solutions to the challenges we face. What is clear, however, is that the free exchange of information and ideas is essential to the functioning of a democratic society, and that any attempt to suppress or manipulate that exchange ultimately harms the public interest.

We have seen that government intervention, while perhaps well-intentioned, can have serious negative consequences. On the other hand, while the free market can solve almost all problems, we also recognize that markets are not infallible and sometimes have their own drawbacks. In such cases, journalists and the public can play their part, and their civic spirit and actions can be a useful complement to the workings of the free market⁴.

In the end, the promotion of responsible communication requires a collective effort

⁴ Some people always have this strange illusion that people in the free market are all morally corrupt, lacking any moral or civic spirit, and specializing in doing things that harm others and harm society in order to pursue their own private interests. However, in the history of the United States, there has never been a lack of citizens who support the free market when government persecutes its own people (including journalists, and several well-known events can prove this). At the same time, we sadly see that some media outlets, which have always been known for being "left-leaning" and for various excellent citizen qualities, actually collude with certain political parties. In fact, in the free market, those who are morally corrupt, harm society, and lack community spirit are often naturally eliminated. The reason is simple: Would you sell a rifle to someone who immediately wants to kill your whole family? Would you continue to work with a business partner who maliciously deceives you on important matters? Moreover, a person is evil in the free market and holy in an authoritarian system - there is no more absurd idea than this.

on the part of government⁵, media, and the public. It is not enough to simply condemn fake news or political bias; we must actively work to build a free market and culture of truth, openness, and democratic values. Only by doing so can we ensure that our society remains well-informed, rational, and free.

⁵ For example, the first thing that the government should do is to eliminate the perverse censorship that is put in place under all kinds of ridiculous pretexts.

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